"What We Heard"

A REPORT ON THE *PARTNERSHIP FOR PROSPERITY* CONSULTATIONS

JUNE 2001

www.saskprosperity.sk.ca

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

Vision for a Prosperous Province

All people in Saskatchewan enjoy prosperity, opportunity, security and a high quality of life as full participants in a thriving, sustainable economy. We greet the future with confidence, knowing that our province is and will continue to be one of the best places in the world in which to live, work, visit and invest.

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Building a Common Vision for Economic Prosperity

The Process

In September 2000, Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development released the consultation document ***Partnership for Prosperity*** to initiate public discussion on Saskatchewan's economic strategy. *Partnership for Prosperity* presented 19 measurable targets for our economy to achieve by the province's centennial year in 2005.

These targets were wide-ranging and focused very firmly on Saskatchewan's unique strengths and opportunities.

The goal was to engage Saskatchewan people in an open, in-depth examination of our economy and where we need to go to achieve prosperity for all. In addition to the consultation document, we established a dedicated website (www.saskprosperity.sk.ca) and a toll-free line for people to get more information.

Through public meetings, meetings with stakeholder organizations, a telephone survey, and a widely distributed questionnaire, we obtained ideas and opinions from thousands of Saskatchewan people. We heard from business and labour organizations, the co-operative sector, community leaders, farmers, Aboriginal peoples, and young people.

In a few short months, we heard a variety of opinions, many innovative ideas, consensus on a number of issues, disagreement on others, and a determination to work together to improve the prosperity of all Saskatchewan people.

"The targets are right. People are looking for leadership and direction as to how to meet them...When our leaders articulate their vision, and can identify clear steps to achieve that vision, the people will respond."

Chuck Thompson, Swift Current

"There is no single best sign of prosperity. A good sign is a combination of employment, household income, economic growth, education attainment levels, population migration and health of citizens!"

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"Targets are good, but are they achievable?"

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"We need a province-wide strategy to encourage a change in attitude toward economic growth and diversification."

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Measurable Targets Essential

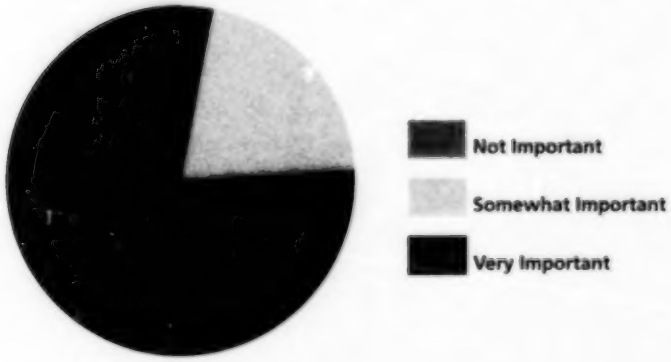
Almost everyone who participated in the consultations said the development of a comprehensive economic strategy is essential to building prosperity in our province. There was clear agreement that the strategy had to set well-defined, measurable targets that will lead to greater accountability.

While people agreed that establishing targets was an excellent idea, there was less agreement on whether the proposed targets were set at the right level. It was suggested that certain targets were too ambitious and could not be reached. Other targets were seen as setting our expectations too low. Some people commented that some of the targets needed more explanation.

Many people stressed the need to identify concrete activities and time frames to achieve the targeted goals. And there was strong support for quick action.

Partnership for Prosperity responds to the feedback heard during the consultation process. Some targets indicated in the discussion document have been adjusted accordingly. The strategy also provides plans of action and identifies measurable benchmarks, and there is a commitment to report on progress.

How important do you believe targets are as part of government accountability?



Charts in this document are derived from the results of a questionnaire distributed in newspapers and at consultation meetings in Fall 2000.

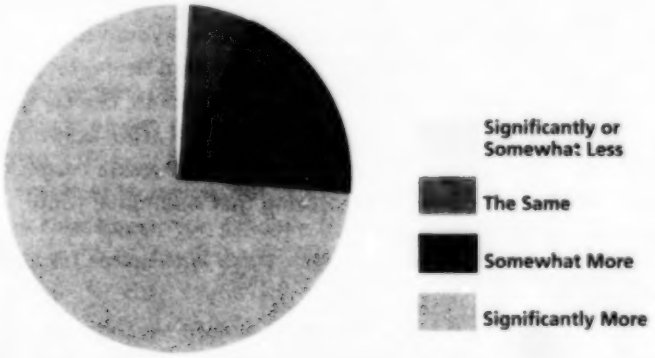
Changing Attitudes

In all of the consultations, there was near unanimity on one issue – Attitude. The vast majority of respondents to our survey – whether in the business, labour or the co-operative sector – said that something needs to be done to improve our perception of the province.

At every meeting, the strengths of Saskatchewan were stated. At every meeting, people commented on how Saskatchewan residents aren't positive enough, or vocal enough, about our province's many positive attributes.

As a first step, people said our attitude needs to be improved. Then we should work on the attitudes of those outside the province. This message was heard loud and clear.

Does Saskatchewan need a less positive or a more positive attitude in the next five years compared to the last five years?



Preparing Ourselves for the New Economy

Increasingly, the intelligent application of technology is driving the economy, not just in new industries, but also in our traditional industries like agriculture, mining and forestry. The consultation process showed that Saskatchewan people want to take bold steps to further this direction.

This translates into strong support for increasing the education level of our people. Although a larger percentage of Saskatchewan's young people attend university full time than in any other western province, most of the people who participated in the consultations said we need to place even greater emphasis on encouraging university and technical education.

"We have a beautiful province and wonderful people – as a province we seem to lack self-esteem, and that has to be turned around if we are to compete and succeed in the world economy."

Jan Ursu, Regina

"We, as parents, business owners, politicians, have to find ways to keep our youth in our province because they are our future."

Garry Dangstorp, Redvers

"The best sign of our province's prosperity will be high employment, and youth choosing to live and work here."

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"Invest in our youth through youth programs in schools and education."

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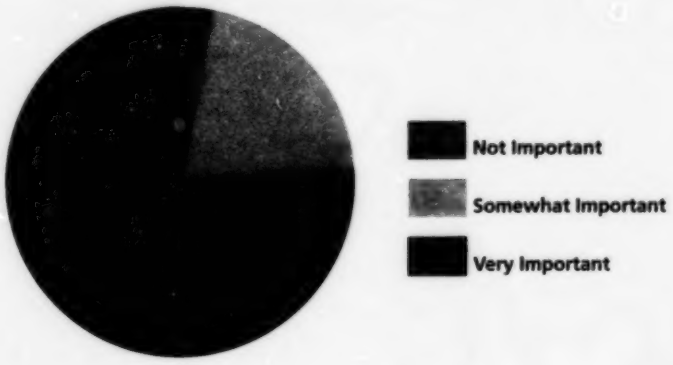

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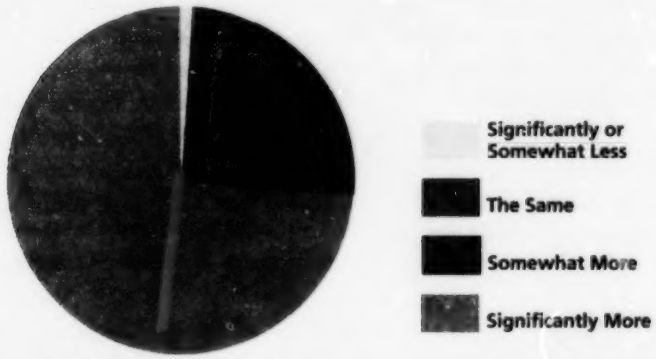

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"The availability of a trained labour force is increasingly becoming an issue. Companies from central American states are calling and would like to relocate to Saskatchewan if they could be assured of a skilled labour force."

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"Make our province attractive for relocating or expanding a developing business. Emphasis should be given to manufacturing and value-added."

Gordon Lang, Saskatoon

"We need to be competitive with 'like' provinces to attract people – to increase economic activity in the province."

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"I would like to see encouragement of high technology businesses to set up here to provide high involvement jobs for 'knowledge' workers."

Shannon Whyley, Saskatoon

There was also support for increasing government and private investment in research and development, information technology and communications infrastructure. People recognize that investment in these areas, and in education, is leading to more jobs and greater opportunity in Saskatchewan, especially for young people.

Youth – Seizing Opportunities

Another recurring theme during the consultations was population. For many, an increasing population was a clear sign of greater prosperity.

More specifically, people said that prosperity means ensuring that our youth stay in the province. There was a focus on youth in the discussions and many stories about young people who had left the province – but also stories of those who have returned home.

People expressed a strong desire to see government leadership and increased support for measures that would stem the historic level of out-migration from our province. Although people recognize there are no easy answers, they said a plan to encourage youth to stay is necessary, and offered many suggestions. We heard strong support for seizing opportunities in fields that appeal to youth, like computer technology and research and development, as well as for upgrading the level of education through apprenticeship and mentoring programs, more post-secondary classes, and ensuring that Aboriginal youth participate fully in the economy.

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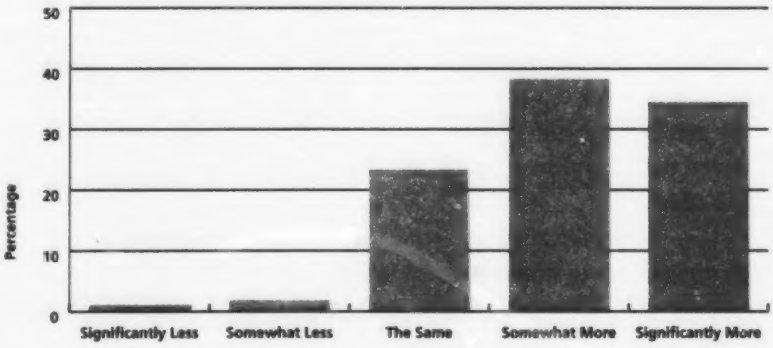

Strong Communities

Throughout the consultation process, it was apparent that Saskatchewan people are concerned about the transitions taking place in rural Saskatchewan. Many noted that greater prosperity for our province would not be achieved without improvement in our agriculture sector.

The clear message was that there is a need for a long-term plan and immediate action – and a greater willingness on the part of government to listen. While some said that government support was needed, most recognized that only the federal government had the assistance to fully address on-farm problems.

Value-added processing of our raw agricultural products was often seen as the key to building a stronger rural economy. People agreed that Saskatchewan must reduce the amount of bulk commodities we ship in hopper cars, and increase the variety of finished products we ship in trucks and container cars. There was less agreement on how this goal could be achieved.

Many commented that without direct government support for processing ventures, rural Saskatchewan would not be able to compete, and further de-population would occur. Others said that government could best help by staying out of the way. Some said that the creation of more New Generation Co-ops – co-ops with a focus on processing – would boost agricultural value-added processing.

Tourism was also mentioned quite often as a major growth opportunity, not just for urban centres, but also for rural and northern Saskatchewan.

A crucial element in achieving growth in the tourism sector is our transportation system. We heard numerous comments on the state of our highways and the need for improvement. People did recognize that the province has limited resources and federal assistance is required. Nonetheless, criticism of the state of our highways is taken seriously, because our transportation system has an enormous impact on the image of the province, our quality of life, the ability to grow our tourism industry, and the overall economy.

"A strong agricultural sector is needed for a vibrant Saskatchewan economy."
Vickie Dutton, North Battleford

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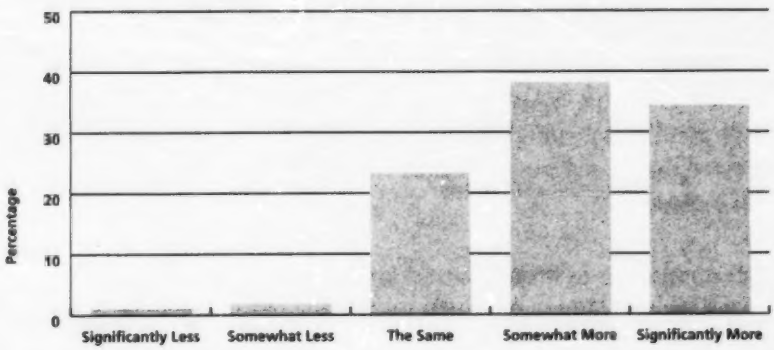

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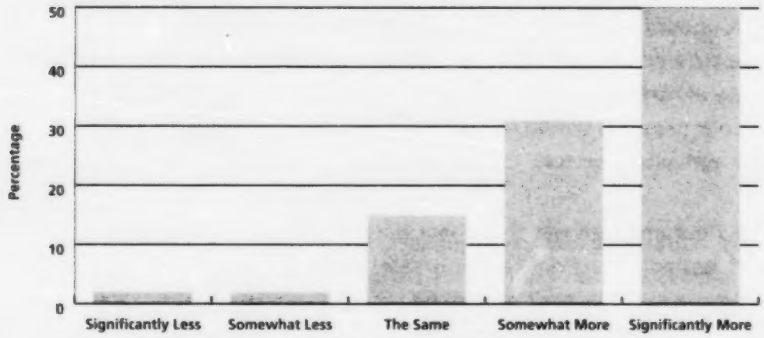

Increasing Aboriginal Participation

At the public meetings, speaker after speaker reinforced the need for Aboriginal people to be more integrated into the economy of the province. It was widely recognized that the prosperity of the province is intimately bound with the long-term prosperity of Aboriginal peoples.

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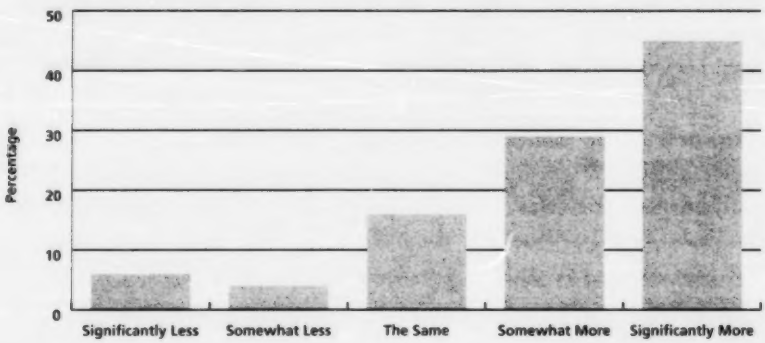

Improving Our Competitive Position

From survey responses and comments at the public meetings, it was obvious that Saskatchewan people understand the need to maintain a competitive trading position – with our neighbours, our major trade partners, and other jurisdictions worldwide. We also know that we will not compete with low wage countries on the basis of labour cost. Saskatchewan will not enter a race to the bottom. Our vision is to raise – not lower – living standards for everyone in the province.

Many saw tax reduction as crucial to achieving economic expansion. We heard calls to reduce the PST, income tax, corporate tax, and municipal tax. People said recent tax cuts were necessary and appreciated, and there was support for further reductions. However, concern was also expressed that if taxes were cut, then services would also have to be reduced. There was strong support for balanced provincial budgets.

People said Saskatchewan should improve its competitive position through tax reductions as well as other measures:

- maintaining a high-quality education system
- improving infrastructure and the level of Internet connectedness
- providing a responsive regulatory environment that reduces overlap and paper-burden while protecting the province's natural resources and workers
- building bridges between labour and business, rural and urban communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

"Reduce taxes so we can be more competitive with other jurisdictions as a place to do business, work and live."

Syd Barber, Swift Current

"Saskatchewan needs to communicate to the business world the advantages we can offer – specifically lower land costs – lower wage costs – strong work ethic in the workforce."

Ron Harris, Prince Albert

"[Tax decreases] cannot come at the expense of the municipalities. If the tax burden is simply transferred, there is no net benefit to Saskatchewan families."

Assiniboia Economic Development Authority

"The most important action to increase economic activity is to just follow what you have been doing so far."

Ed Beeson, Biggar

"Government red tape needs to be cut. A 25% reduction in regulations is not enough."

Marty Solberg, Swift Current

"Three things that are equally important to increase economic activity – increased job growth, lower personal income tax and increased positive attitudes about Saskatchewan."

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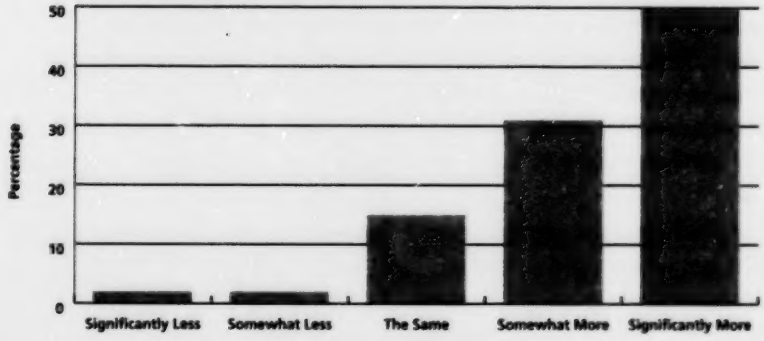

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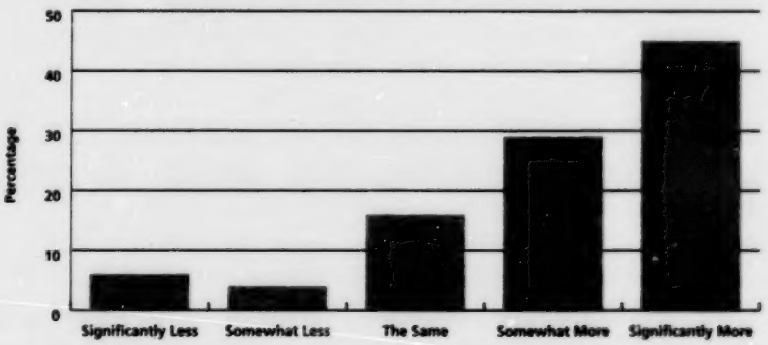

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- building bridges between labour and business, rural and urban communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

"Reduce taxes so we can be more competitive with other jurisdictions as a place to do business, work and live."

Syd Barber, Swift Current

"Saskatchewan needs to communicate to the business world the advantages we can offer – specifically lower land costs – lower wage costs – strong work ethic in the workforce."

Ron Harris, Prince Albert

"[Tax decreases] cannot come at the expense of the municipalities. If the tax burden is simply transferred, there is no net benefit to Saskatchewan families."

Assiniboia Economic Development Authority

"The most important action to increase economic activity is to just follow what you have been doing so far."

Ed Beeson, Biggar

"Government red tape needs to be cut. A 25% reduction in regulations is not enough."

Marty Solberg, Swift Current

"Three things that are equally important to increase economic activity – increased job growth, lower personal income tax and increased positive attitudes about Saskatchewan."

Warren Chykowski, Saskatoon

"Saskatchewan people are proud of their province. Attitude is everything. If we talk like winners, we will be!"
Richard Okrainec, Yorkton

"Retail co-ops are the backbone of many small communities."
Karen Harilstad, Davidson

"What is the next phase of this – you can set targets and make them as high-sounding as they can be, but how do you get the people on side to implement?"
Ron Hunter, Saskatoon

"Interparty communication is also needed – everyone working together including the workforce and entrepreneurs."
Ernest Heebee, Swift Current

"Full employment – a high standard of living – reduced need for social assistance – that will be the best sign of our province's prosperity in the future."
Mervin Sundbo, Birch Hills

The Next Steps

One underlying message we heard is the need to find common ground, and develop strategies that will help us work together to achieve a shared vision for the province. That vision extends beyond greater financial rewards, and includes deeply-held Saskatchewan values such as high quality education and health care, opportunity for all, and a clean environment.

Government has a significant role in leading the process. It also has a responsibility to ensure our economy is positioned strategically to create wealth for the population and to maintain the quality of life we enjoy.

Government's role in the economy is crucial. But government is not the engine of growth – that is the role of the businesses, co-operatives and working people.

The intent of the *Partnership for Prosperity* consultations is to develop a provincial economic development strategy – not a government strategy. *Partnership for Prosperity* is not just about what government can do. It is about what all of us, including government, can do.

The final strategy gives us a road map to follow. We must continue to listen and work with our partners, to turn our ideas into actions and achieve our goals. As we move to achieve our targets and assess our progress, we must also be prepared to respond to changing conditions and new opportunities.

The large number of people who participated in the *Partnership for Prosperity* consultations indicates the importance of developing a comprehensive economic strategy for the province. Although we will not always agree on the details, Saskatchewan people do want to work together to create a more prosperous province.

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